

THE FRIEND OF SINNERS
LUKE 7:36-50

The Bible is filled with deeply profound statements — life-changing statements. You know many of them and have been guided and helped by them. It is a temptation for us to say, “*this* is the most important statement in the Bible” or “*this* is the most important statement about Jesus Christ.” I won’t say that. But this morning we come to a section that demonstrates one of those great statements about Christ: “*Jesus is a friend of sinners.*” The Son of Man who is over all, stoops to love sinners, His enemies. And not only does He love them, but He forgives them and then makes them His friends. *His friends.*

What is your friendship quotient? It has been observed that “Most people have friends. But few of us know true friendship. Many of us don’t know we’re missing two of the greatest joys in life: walking with others in true friendship and knowing Jesus as the great Friend.” [Hunter and Ortland, *Made for Friendship*.]

What is Jesus like as a friend?

“What if you had a friend at the center of the bull’s-eye of your relationship circle, whom you knew would never raise his eyebrows at what you share with him, even the worst parts of you? All our human friendships have a limit to what they can withstand. But what if there were a friend with no limit? No ceiling on what he would put up with and still want to be with you? ‘All the kinds and degrees of friendship meet in Christ,’ wrote Sibbes.” [Dane Ortland, *Gentle and Lowly*.]

What is Jesus like as a friend? He is a friend of sinners (5:20; 7:34). He begins friendship with us by forgiving us of our sin. All our sin (when we repent). And when we know that friendship, how can we not love Him? That’s what Luke reveals to us about Jesus in the account of Jesus’ dinner at Simon’s house at the end of Luke 7 —

EVERY SINNER CAN COME TO JESUS. FORGIVEN SINNERS WILL LOVE JESUS.

We will see this morning that our sin doesn’t keep us from accessing God; in fact only when we acknowledge our sin will we have access to Him. And experiencing the grace we receive when we come to Him, we will love Him. In this account Jesus (as the Son of Man) demonstrates His authority to heal sin and provides two implications for us and our sin.

1. **If You are a Sinner, COME to Jesus (vv. 36-39)**
2. **If You are a Forgiven Sinner, LOVE Jesus (vv. 40-50)**
 - **A Parable (vv. 40-43)**
 - **An Explanation (vv. 44-47)**
 - **An Exclamation Point (vv. 48-50)**

- Luke is still revealing Jesus as the Son of Man and Messiah in Galilee (map/chart).
- We don't know the location or exact time of this event, but Luke wants us to see it connected to the interaction with John the Baptist's disciples (vv. 18-23).
- Jesus' response to them was "what do you see — is it biblical?" (v. 22). He drew attention to the work of the Messiah to heal (blindness and lameness), to cleanse (lepers), and to forgive (gospel).
- The two preceding stories in this chapter were about healings; this one is about *spiritual* healing.

1. If You are a Sinner, COME to Jesus (vv. 36-39)

• An Invitation (v. 36)

- ✓ The Pharisees willfully and intentionally rejected Christ (v. 30), accusing Him of sin (v. 34) and His forerunner of being a messenger of Satan (v. 33).
- ✓ And now a Pharisee invites Jesus to dinner/banquet (ironic, considering v. 34). Luke doesn't tell us his motive, but given his attitude (v. 39) and how Jesus condemns him (v. 47), it's clear it wasn't a friendly invitation. He is seeking to trap Jesus.
- ✓ [Aside: don't confuse this with a similar event during the Passion week (Jn. 12:1ff); the host of that event was also a Simon, but that one was a leper, not a Pharisee (Mk. 14:3ff); & other differences...]
- ✓ So Jesus entered the home and reclined at the table —
 - Tables might be large squares or in a U-shape (servers served from "inside" the tables)
 - Couches were arranged outside the tables and pointed away from the tables
 - Guests were given cushions to lay on and support their left arms; right arm would take food
 - This is why the woman would have remained near the feet of Jesus; His head was inaccessible
- ✓ Jesus ate at least three other times with Pharisees (11:37; 14:1; 19:5); only Luke records these stories, revealing to us that the Son of Man is greater than the "greatest" teachers of the day.

• An Interruption (vv. 37-38)

- ✓ We know the invitation was made publicly because someone unconnected to the Pharisee heard about the event and showed up — **a woman in the city**.
 - Luke is being discreet; he calls her a **sinner**; she is likely an adulteress or prostitute (because her hair was unbound, something common with prostitutes); whatever the sin, it was public...
 - That she was a sinner might have been "scandalous" to the Pharisee, but Luke commonly speaks about Jesus' interaction with sinners (e.g., 4:43; 5:30-32; 15:1ff).
 - He wants us to see the grace and hope that is found in the Son of Man (and nowhere else). A novelist and humanist named Marghanita Laski said shortly before her death: "What I envy most about you Christians is your forgiveness; I have nobody to forgive me." This woman did.

- ✓ You might wonder how she could get into the Pharisee's home. Hospitality practices of the day were that uninvited guests were allowed to enter — even beggars, who would be allowed to take food.
- ✓ Given the Pharisee's concern for ritual purity, "she comes into this scene like a communicable disease."
- ✓ She arrived with an **alabaster vial of perfume** — her goal was to anoint Jesus with something far more costly than olive oil (the norm for anointing); depending on what was used to make the perfume, it could have cost as much as a year's salary for an ordinary laborer (extravagant gift).
- ✓ What is most interrupting, though, is not her arrival, but what she did when she arrived (4 actions); she clearly had planned to anoint Jesus; the rest of the actions seem spontaneous:
 - **Weeping...wet His feet** = Standing beside Him, she is overwhelmed by emotion and begins weeping. Perhaps grief, likely joy for Christ's forgiveness (v. 48). Her tears were no small amount — that they needed to be wiped indicated it was a large amount; and **wet** was used of rain showers. She is gushing — an emotional dam had burst.
 - **Wiping them with the hair of her head** = A woman's hair was her glory and it was considered shameful to even have her hair let down. So how humbling was it for her to wipe His feet with her "glory?" It was humility and grace (devotion) beyond our comprehension.
 - **Kissing His feet** = A kiss could be an act of deep reverence, respect, and joy (father with returned son, Lk. 15:20). Her kiss was also humbling (as humbling then as it is now).
 - **Anointing them** = This is not a religious anointing, but something that might have been done for a guest on his head when he arrived; not able to reach His head, she anoints His feet.
 - The way Luke tells the story, each of these things clearly takes time and are sequential; it is as if everyone in the room stops, turns, and watches as she takes her time to worship Christ.
- ✓ That's the story. She finishes. How will people respond? What will they do?

• An Indictment (v. 39)

- ✓ The **Pharisee** responded, but quietly (inwardly) **to himself**. He was indignant, but even in his own home, he was being careful with what he said. He has a two-fold condemnation:
 - **He condemns Christ** — he doesn't even use Jesus' name, calling Him **this man**. He doesn't acknowledge Jesus by name and he denounces Jesus' ability — **if this man were a prophet...** (meaning that he doesn't believe Jesus is a prophet like John, the OT prophets, or anyone else). Rather than seeing the woman's acts as legitimate expressions of worship, he denounces them and suggests that now Jesus is unclean because she has been **touching Him**.
... He can't believe that Jesus accepts the woman's actions.
... He had to let her into his house, but he believes that Jesus should not have allowed her acts.
 - **He condemns the woman** — **she is a sinner**. Yes, she is a sinner (Rom. 3:23; Eph. 2:1-3). But he means that she is a **SINNER** (worse than others and certainly worse than the Pharisee).
 - Simon's evaluation of Jesus and the woman is typical of the Pharisees (v. 34).

- Summary: what does Luke mean us to see with this story? —
 - ✓ Jesus *is* a friend of sinners. He does not befriend them to engage in their sin. He is their friend to help them out of their sin (Jn. 15:13-15; Gal. 2:20).
 - ✓ Jesus is a friend of *the worst* of sinners:
 - All sin is equal in that any sin is enough to condemn us to Hell.
 - All sin prior to salvation is equal in that we could do nothing to please God. Totally unable.
 - All sin is equal in that all people are born with a nature of sin in the same way.
 - But not all sin is equal in that some sins have greater consequences and implications.
 - This story tells us that whatever the sin, the sinner is invited to come to Jesus. What is your sin? Is it something that you think is miniscule and not worth bringing to God? Or do you think it is something massive that God would never forgive? Come to Jesus. He invites you (Mt. 11:28). Even more, He is coming to you and asking for access to your life to change you (Rev. 3:20).
 - ✓ And beware of skepticism and rejection...

2. If You are a Forgiven Sinner, LOVE Jesus (vv. 40-50)

• A Parable (vv. 40-43)

- ✓ The Pharisee has dismissed Jesus as inconsequential; not the Messiah and less than a prophet. Notice:
 - **And Jesus answered him.** The Pharisee spoke quietly, inwardly, to himself, in his heart. No one heard — but Jesus did and Jesus *answered* him! In fact, Luke says, “Jesus answered and said!” That Jesus answered the man’s thought indicates He is not only a prophet, but far more!
 - **Simon, I have something to say to you...** The Pharisee refused to acknowledge Jesus’ name, though he certainly knew it; Jesus uses Simon’s name to indicate, “I know you...” The Pharisee is known by the One who created him.
 - ... Further, the use of the name is a means of calling him to attention (we do the same thing; using a name for a close friend or family member can be a means of indicating seriousness).
 - ... And for Jesus to say ***I have something to say*** also hints at His authority to speak. When Christ speaks, God is speaking. When God speaks, none can dispute or change it (v. 48).
- ✓ Instead of addressing Simon directly, Jesus tells a simple story (like Nathan with David, 2 Sam. 12).
 - Jesus’ parable isn’t about sin/sinners/adultery, but the parallels are quickly and easily seen.
 - **A moneylender had two debtors.** Borrowing money was discouraged in the OT (and Israelites weren’t to lend money to Israelites; they were to be compassionate and give, Dt. 23:19f).
 - ... Yet debt wasn’t unusual because the economics of farming were hard. Wealthy landowners leased land to poor farmers and demanded a large percentage of the profits. And taxes accounted for 35-40% of income. And if there was a bad crop or drought, the farmer was in trouble.
 - ... If they couldn’t repay they could be imprisoned, with virtually no way out (Mt. 18:23ff).

... In the story, there were two levels of debt — **500 denarii...and fifty denarii**. A day laborer made a denarius daily, so the amount of the debts were about 1¾ years, and two months.

... The amount was massive for both (**neither was able to repay**, v. 42), but we are meant to see the comparison: one is 10x greater.

- Then Jesus introduces an unexpected twist in v. 42b — **he graciously forgave them both**. The debt was absolved. He made a **gift** of what they owed. It's out of character for the lender and it is unexpected for the borrower. (Have you received a gift like that? You can imagine the joy!)
 - Here is also the gospel in miniature: a hopeless condition and a magnanimous gift/forgiveness.
 - If you are not a believer in Christ, this is what God offers: to your great sin, He offers the greater grace of forgiveness. If you repent, He will forgive you and liberate you (**3:3**). Will you repent?
- ✓ Now here is the point of the story — Jesus asks it in a question: **which one will love him more?**
- While the stories (the woman and the parable) are about God's kindness to sinners, the point Jesus is making is about the response of the sinners to God's kindness.
 - Simon's response is reluctant/hesitant — **I suppose** (he anticipates being trapped by his words).
 - Jesus affirms his answer — **judged correctly**. The answer is apparent. Greater debt (or awareness of debt) will cost the forgiver more and incline the recipient to deeper gratitude and affection.
 - Simon made two primary errors: he misunderstood the grace of God to forgive the woman and the nature of his sin that needed to be forgiven.
 - The more we are aware of the magnitude of our sin that has been forgiven, the more we will rejoice over the forgiveness and love the Forgiver. In that way, it is sometimes good to remember our past life — not to provoke us to sinful regret and introspection, but to remember the depth from which God has pulled us and saved us (e.g., **Eph. 2:11-14; Phil. 3:4ff**).

• An Explanation (vv. 44-47)

- ✓ Jesus **turns to the woman** but He keeps speaking to Simon (she's the silent object lesson). He compares what the woman did to what Simon did not do. Simon invited Jesus which seemed hospitable, but he did not do for Jesus what hospitality demanded, which revealed that he wasn't actually inviting Jesus into his home for fellowship; he was rejecting Jesus.
- ✓ **I entered your house; you gave Me no water for My feet** (**v. 44**) = convention said a servant should have had a vessel of water and towel to wash each guest's feet. Simon didn't wash Jesus' feet — and didn't even make a servant available to do it. The woman did — at a much greater cost to her honor.
- ✓ **You gave Me no kiss** (**v. 45**). That is, there was no kiss of greeting/welcome/fellowship. That was also a part of hospitality and fellowship (akin to avoiding handshake/hug today). But the woman welcomed Jesus with a much more humbling act of greeting and joy.
- ✓ **You did not anoint My head with oil** (**v. 46**) Olive oil would be used both to honor and as a kind of refreshment (like hot towel or lotion) for a guest, particularly if they had traveled.

- ✓ The woman anointed the feet of Jesus in an act of devotion and humility.
- ✓ Simon did nothing to honor Jesus, welcome Jesus, or indicate he had any desire for fellowship. His lack of hospitality indicated his hostility toward Jesus. The woman went far beyond expected conventions.
- ✓ Jesus makes the sharp conclusion: ***I say to you...*** That's authoritative. "You don't think I'm a prophet? I am *the* Prophet (Messiah, Dt. 18:15) and speak with the authority of the Son of Man...
- ✓ ***Her sins which are many*** (v. 47; He does not dispute that she was a great sinner; she was and He was well aware of all her sins). But her sins did not preclude the forgiveness of God and did not preclude her worship and service of Christ.
 - ***[They] have been forgiven for she loved much*** = He is not saying, "I now forgive you because of your acts of love" (as if her loving acts were able to save her).
 - He is saying ***her sins have been forgiven*** (in the past, and you are still being forgiven). And her acts of love reflect that she has been forgiven. [Don't be confused by the use of "for/because" — Jesus is using it in this way: "it is raining because the windows are wet" doesn't mean the wet windows make the rain; the wet windows evidence the rain; her acts of love evidence faith.]
 - She loves Christ because she is aware of the magnitude of Christ's forgiveness of her.
 - Conversely, ***he who is forgiven little loves little***. As with the previous phrase, if there is little love, it is because there is little awareness of the sin that needs to be forgiven. Jesus is clearly inferring that Simon doesn't love Christ because he has no awareness of his need for Christ.
 - (That is a good test for everyone: do I love Christ [Jn. 21:15-17]? If not, what do I think of my sinful condition? Do I think I have too much sin? Or do I think I don't have any sin?)

- **An Exclamation Point (vv. 48-50)**

- ✓ In case Simon (or the woman or the others at the meal) missed the point, Jesus put an exclamation point on the event and the story: ***then he said to her*** (the first time either of them speak to each other) — ***your sins have been forgiven***.
 - He reemphasizes what He has already said to Simon: ***have been forgiven*** (in the past and still). We don't know when she had repented, but at some earlier time she had heard His message and repented and trusted in His grace to forgive her.
 - Two times she has been accused of being a sinner (by the town, v. 37, and Simon, v. 39) and two times now Jesus has declared her forgiven.
 - ***What does it mean to be forgiven?*** It means that the sin is wiped away. It is removed. God no longer holds the sin against the sinner any longer (Col. 2:14). The sin is still real in that we really did sin, but the guilt for the sin is removed (not culpable); we are free (Rom. 8:1).
 - God no longer condemns us for our sin — and He never again will. It's gone. Removed.
 - "...sin confessed and adequately repented is *actually abolished*; and that...sinner does really begin again as if he has never sinned." [Chesterton]
 - Why does He do that? He is a friend to sinners (5:20, 31-32; 15:1, 7ff; Jn. 15:13, 15ff).

- ✓ The response of the others in the house is what we might anticipate: ***who is this man...?***
 - Like Simon, these were likely internal thoughts (***among themselves***), but they were in agreement — “who does this One think He is?” (cf. 5:21).
 - I’ll tell you who He is — He is the Son of Man with all authority in Heaven and earth.
 - Luke wants us to wrestle with the same question — who is this and do I trust and believe Him?
 - Do you? You *are* a sinner; but His salvation is enough for all your sins. You trust Him.
- ✓ Again ***He said to the woman*** — Simon had invited Jesus into his home, but the final word in the story is reserved for the woman. And it is a word of comfort.
 - ***Your faith has saved you.*** That means she was not saved by anything she did, but simply repenting and believing that Christ would spare her from God’s wrath.
 - It also means — “your faith has saved you (your sins haven’t condemned you).” You are free.
 - That’s why Jesus also says, ***Go in peace.*** While her sins were great, she could go from that house, confident that she was at peace with God. He was not her enemy; Christ was her friend.
 - The only resolution for guilt is not to pretend it doesn’t exist (which is the world’s answer), but to acknowledge that it *does* exist — I *am* a great sinner, but God has removed my sin so I am no longer guilty. I am at peace.
 - If you are wrestling with guilt and lack of peace:
 - ... Have you repented of your sin (or are you holding on to it or not acknowledging it)?
 - ... Do you believe that Jesus has done what He said He would do?

CONCLUSION: Friendships tend to come and go. Sometimes it is because one friend moves away. Or interests change. Or common commitments change and they drift apart. But too often it’s because something happens to the relationship. There are misunderstandings. There are false assumptions. Reconciliation doesn’t take place. Sometimes they don’t drift apart, but they break apart. And all the commonalities of shared life are lost.

It will never be that way with Jesus. He is the friend of sinners. He is the One who invites sinners to come to Him. He is the One who goes to sinners. He is the One who forgives sinners. And sinners who have gone to Him and found forgiveness love Him. Are you confident that He has forgiven your sin — the massive quantity of your sin and the worst of your sin? Do you love Him and delight in Him for such grace that you have received from Him?

BENEDICTION: Prayer for new members.